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**MEDIA, IDENTITY AND DIASPORA:
INDIANS ABROAD**

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The aim of this chapter is to present a profile and pattern of Indian diaspora together with the causes which led to the emigration of Indians from India. In the process of presenting various faces of Indian diaspora, the paper seeks answers to the following questions: (1) What does the term 'diaspora' mean and how does it relate to the Indian diaspora? (2) What are the defining features of the Indian diaspora? Does it make any sense to use labels such as 'Indian diaspora' in view of the highly diverse nature of the Indian presence worldwide? (3) What is the American perception of Indian Americans and does this perception match the self-perception of Indian Americans? (4) Are Indian Americans a part or yet apart in their transplanted environment? (5) What identity are the media either consciously or sub-consciously portraying for Indians abroad? (6) Do both ethnic and the main-stream media help or hinder in the promotion of the Indian identity? While attempting to answer these questions, some aspects of the tension between Indian identity as perceived by Indians and by the host nations are dealt with.

Introduction

An Ancient Indian Sanskrit text captures the essence of diaspora by saying:

'There is no happiness for him who does not travel, Rohita! Thus we have heard. Living in the society of men, the best man becomes a sinner. Therefore, wander!

The feet of the wanderer are like the flower, his soul is growing and reaping the fruit; and all his sins are destroyed by his fatigues in wandering. Therefore, wander!

The fortune of him who is sitting, sits; it rises when he rises; it sleeps when he sleeps, it moves when he moves. Therefore, wander!'

The Aitreya Brahmanam, 7:15 (700 BC-600 BC)

Diaspora, Identity, and Language Communities

(Studies in the Linguistic Sciences 31:1, Spring 2001)

Ancient Indians were well known for traveling to distant lands and for explorations. The Hindu sages and Buddhist monks traveled to distant lands in search for knowledge, higher values of life, and to spread the word of the Buddha. Indian traders traveled to trade and acquire new skills. They were the pioneers of Indian diaspora, those who left their mark as far as Central Asia, and South-East Asia. That was perhaps the golden era (300 BC-800 AD) of the Indian diaspora.

The golden period was followed by a wave of emigration which marked the darkest chapter in the history of the Indian diaspora. The stage and the tone of the new diaspora was set by the Gypsies and a crystal-ball reading foretold its fate. The Gypsies, who are often mistakenly identified as Egyptians, were actually north Indians, mostly Rajputs, who started their journey from India at the turn of the 4th century. Genetic blood tests, Sanskrit-based language, music, and customs strongly point to their Indian roots. (See Hancock 1987:7-15, Sutherland 1986, and Singhal 1982, among others, for the Indian roots of the Gypsies.) Their journey has its own ironic twist. Chosen to defend India from foreign invasions (mostly Muslim), the Gypsies kept moving away from India, settled for a significant length of time in Persia, and then moved on to almost every part of the world — Asia, the Middle East, Australia, Africa, Americas and Europe — always yearning to return to their homeland but never able to do so. They were hunted, enslaved, and persecuted in Europe and other parts of the world and as a recent film graphically depicts, the curse on the Gypsies is still on (see 'Curse on the Gypsies' 1998). Although the fate of Africans and Jews in diaspora improved significantly during the post-World War II era, the fate of the Gypsies still awaits better understanding and treatment on the part of host nations and communities. Perhaps the new century will turn the tide of what can best be characterized as the world's most despised and ill-fated diaspora group.

The migration of Indians in the nineteenth century opened yet another dark chapter in the history of the Indian diaspora. In this period, many Indians went abroad in search of work to improve their economic conditions under the indentured-labor system, soon after the abolition of slavery in British (1834-1838), French (1848), and Dutch colonies (1863-1873). The Indian immigration to the United States began with an equally distressing situation when the Asian Exclusion League, consisting of White European Americans, virtually declared war on a handful of Indian laborers working in lumber and sawmills in the state of Washington. Not only were the 'riots' organized, but the ugly blend of media attention and politics herded Indians out of Washington like cattle. However, the face of Indian immigration began to change radically during the second half of the twentieth century with a shift from a racial immigration policy to a secular one.

By 1990, approximately two-thirds of Mauritians, more than half of Fijians, about half of Guyanians, and about one-third of Trinidadians were Indians. Indians today live in many countries (Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, Guyana, Reunion, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Germany, Australia, the United States, and many countries of the

Middle East.). See Clarke et al. 1990 for a complete list which reveals that Indians live practically in every country of the world. Their adaptability, entrepreneurship, solid work ethic, and technical knowledge have earned them a significant place among the global diasporic communities. Indians are considered one of the three most important global diasporic communities, the other two being the Jewish and Chinese communities (Kotkin 1993). The estimated size of the world-wide Indian diasporic population has jumped to an estimated 15-20 million, an increase of about 300-400% since 1960.

Contextualizing diaspora

The aim of this chapter is to seek answers to the following questions: (1) What does the term 'diaspora' mean and how does it relate to the Indian diaspora? (2) What are the defining features of the Indian diaspora? Does it make any sense to use labels such as 'Indian diaspora' in view of the highly diverse nature of the Indian presence world-wide? (3) What is the American perception of Indian Americans, and does this perception match the self-perception of Indian Americans? (4) Are Indian Americans 'a part or yet apart' in their transplanted environment? (5) What identity are the media either consciously or subconsciously portraying for Indians abroad? (6) Do both ethnic and the mainstream media help or hinder in the depiction of the desired Indian identity?

In the process of answering these questions, I will present a profile and pattern of the Indian diaspora, together with the causes which led to the emigration of Indians from India. In this analysis I will consider some aspects of the tension between Indian identity as perceived by Indians and by the host nations. These questions will be answered with special reference to Indians in America for the following two reasons: (1) The Indian American community serves as a model for the Indian diaspora outside the United States and holds the key to the future of Indian diaspora world-wide; and (2) The Indian American community is all-inclusive in nature — both old and new diasporic Indian communities have come to America. In other words, the Indian community in America is a 'microcosm' of the Indian diaspora.

The term *diaspora* can be defined in a number of ways. The broad notion of diaspora refers to 'dispersion from the homeland'. If one considers this broad definition, then all Indians, including the Gypsy communities of Europe, will form the Indian diaspora. However, if one considers a narrow notion such as the 'link (physical or psychological) with the homeland' as an important criterion for diaspora, then the Gypsies would not be considered a part of the Indian diaspora because they have lost their links to their homeland at both the physical and psychological levels. The diasporic Indian community that I will attempt to account for meets both these criteria. However, the next section presents yet another criterion which might tempt one to contest this label. For more details regarding the question of labels and the adequacies of labels such as 'Asian American', see Shankar & Srikanth 1998.

Features of Indian diaspora

Before I attempt to isolate the salient features of the Indian Diaspora, it is imperative to examine the causes and the history that led Indians to leave their homeland. The first major migration of modern Indians started from the nineteenth century and occurred in three waves.

(a) Indentured System

The first wave of emigration came from India soon after the abolition of slavery. This marked the onset of the indentured-labor system (often called the 'Coolie' system). Under this system, Indians were brought to the Caribbean area, Africa, and islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans to work on sugar plantations, to fill a labor gap left by the emancipation of slaves, and to provide better economic opportunities abroad (see Jain 1993, van der Veer 1995). Although the indenture system was terminated in 1920, the Indian immigration to the British colonies continued. The linguistic, religious, geographical and gender identity of the immigrants to the colonies is given in Table I.

Table 1

PERIOD	COUNTRIES	COLONIES	MIGRATION		LANGUAGE	RELIGION	GENDER
			MAJOR GROUP	MINOR GROUP			
1840's	Trinidad	British	UP and Bengal	South India	Hindi, Bengali	Hindus	Male
1860's	Natal, SA	British	UP and Bengal	South India	Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil	Hindus	Male
1870's	Surinam	Dutch	UP and Bengal	South India	Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil	Hindus	Male
1880's	Fiji	annexation British	UP and Bengal	South India	Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil	Hindus	Male
1870's	Southeast Asia	British	Tamil mainly	other South	Tamil, Telugu	Hindus, Muslims	Male
1890's	Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika (1919)	British East Africa	Gujarat, Punjab	Goa	Gujarati	Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Muslims	mixed

(b) Non-indentured migration to South-East Asia

The second wave of emigration that came from India consisted of nonindentured migration. Mostly it was South Indian Tamils who migrated to South-East Asian colonies, such as Sri Lanka, Malaya, and Burma to work on tea and rubber plantations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In addition to serving as plantation workers, they also became money-lenders and worked at blue-collar jobs.

(c) Free migration to Africa

Like the Chinese migration to the United States, the odyssey of Indians to East Africa began with the building of railways in countries such as Kenya and Uganda in the 1890's. They were neither indentured nor contractual plantation workers, but were largely free immigrants, who later played a very important role in the local economy. They worked as lower civil servants, small-business owners, professionals, and merchants. During this period, Indian merchants paid the immigrants' way to set up businesses in South Africa to serve as satellites to the original core of the indentured Indian community.

(d) Indian diaspora in the nineteenth century: Transplantation and transformation

There are some striking parallels between the Indian diasporic tradition during the colonial era and the African Slave tradition in the United States. Although the Indians were not chained, the experiences of crossing the oceans were equally traumatic for both groups. The conditions in the living quarters were equally distressing. Some of the indentured laborers sought relief from such harsh conditions by returning to their home country, only to be betrayed by their homeland on account of the belief-system of that time. In those days any one who crossed the boundary of the Indian Ocean was considered untouchable (see Bhatia 1986:1-2). In spite of this, unlike the African slaves in the United States, Indians enjoyed more freedom to maintain and practice their religious beliefs, family structure, and linguistic traditions. Naturally, these values underwent transformations under the new conditions. For example, the Hindi language changed after coming in contact with creole languages of Trinidad. Bhatia 1988 gives an account of the three-generational linguistic changes which the language of Trinidad Indians underwent. The caste system among Hindus weakened to varying degrees, though Indians of East Africa maintained their ties to the caste system more vigorously than their Caribbean counterparts. A recent archeological work (Armstrong 1998) provides a rare look and a unique account of the living quarters and evidence of the changing caste system among Indians in Jamaica. The living quarters of Indians reveal that they varied from both the African and the European communities in terms of having a far higher ratio of clothing items (primarily buttons) and adornment items (decorative objects such as metal tips) than the other two communities. They also differed from the other two communities 'in their limited use of bottled pharmaceutical items (health and hygiene items), presumingly preferring herbs' (Armstrong 1998:394). An equal access to accumulation of material

goods might have weakened caste barriers on one hand and strengthened community ties on the other.

(e) Indian Diaspora: A Reincarnation

After gaining independence from the former colonial powers, Indians made important strides in terms of their economic, educational, and professional situations. However, they failed to make any significant political gains. With the exception of Mauritius, Indians were not able to achieve political control in the independent nations of Fiji, Trinidad, Guyana, Myanmar, Uganda or Kenya, despite their strong presence. The tensions between the native populations and the Indians often resulted in either expulsion, as was the case in Uganda under the dictator, Idi Amin, or in repression by violent military force, as in Fiji in 1987, when native Fijians prevented democratically elected Indians from taking power by using military means. These incidents started the flow of Indian refugees to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, thus marking the renewal of the Indian diaspora.

Indian diaspora in the twentieth century

Indian Diaspora in the United States

The earliest record of an Indian arriving in the United States was of a man/visitor from Madras. It is reported that he visited Massachusetts in 1790. In 1851, six Indians marched in the Salem Fourth of July parade, representing the 'East India Marine Society.' Some Indian traders made their way to America in the late nineteenth century to trade silk, spices, and other commodities. The high point of the nineteenth century was the visit by the Hindu monk, Swami Vivekananda, who addressed the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The goodwill created by his visit took several steps backward during the dawn of the twentieth century, however, when the systematic pattern of the Indian immigration to the United States began. Indian migration to the United States took place in four stages in the twentieth century:

Phase I: 1907-1924

This was the darkest chapter in the history of U.S. immigration. The earliest Indian migrants were approximately 6,400 male Sikhs and some Muslims from rural Punjab. Most of them came via Canada and settled down on the West coast. After facing rejection and riots by the white workers of the Asian Exclusion League in the lumber-mills and sawmills, they returned to familiar professions, i.e. agricultural work. During this stage Indians were perceived as hostile groups because of their involvement with the Gadar movement to free India from Great Britain. The only silver lining was the election of the first elected Indo-American representative, Dilip Singh Saund, to Congress.

Phase-II: 1924-1946

During the great depression, a decline in Indian population took place. Many Indians returned to India in search of peace and self-respect.

Phase-III: 1946-1965

The change in U.S. immigration policies in the allocation of small quotas for Indians reversed the pattern of Indian immigration during this era. The Nazi period in Germany called for soul-searching among Americans, and realizations about their own racial policies led Americans to liberalize their immigration policies. During 1946-1965, about 6,000 Indians came to the US; among them were educated professionals who came for higher education in American universities and later decided to reside in America.

Phase-IV: 1965-1974

The shift in immigration requirements from quotas to professional skills marked a critical turning point in Indian immigration. Indian immigration increased dramatically – up 2,000%. Not only did the pattern of immigration to America experience a radical shift, with one-third of the total immigrants being female, but professionals also made significant strides in terms of fulfilling immigration's professional skills requirements. From being an insignificant Asian group, Asian Indians became the fourth-largest ethnic group during this period, trailing only the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos.

Phase V: The Late Twentieth Century Diaspora: Europe, Australia, and the Middle East

In the 1950's and 1960's, the flow of Sikhs from Punjab to the United Kingdom marked the beginning of the Indian diaspora to Europe. They were lured there by the promise of blue-collar employment. During the same period, liberalized immigration policies also led Indians to migrate to Australia. In the 1980's, Germany and Austria attracted Indian professionals to migrate there. During the oil boom of the 1970's, Indians flocked to oil-rich nations of the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Indian Americans: Profile in the USA

On October 25, 1994, the U.S. Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans issued the following statement regarding the economic and political power of Indian Americans:

Growing economically at a pace matched only by one other Asian group, Indians living in America now earn more than any other ethnic community in the United States and hence are positioned to exercise unprecedented political influence in the upcoming election.

With a mean family income of about \$60,000, the highest of any Asian group in the U.S.A. and more than 25% higher than the national average, the economic power of Indians is indisputable. Furthermore, in the area of education, the 1990

Census Bureau data reveals that 87.5% of Asian Indians in America have completed their high school diploma. More than 58% hold Bachelor or higher degrees, which is the highest among all Asian-American groups. Their presence in the fields of engineering, science, medicine, literature, and technology is staggering. More than 5,000 Indians serve as faculty members in American universities. They have produced a number of Nobel laureates (e.g. Dr. Har Govind Khurana in medicine, Dr. S. Chandrashekhar in physics, Dr. Sen in economics). In select industries, such as computer software, hotel and motel businesses, farm economies, their presence is also notable (see for details Helweg & Helweg 1990 and Kotkin 1992 about the success story of Indians).

Diversity and pluralism are two defining features of Indians in general and of Indian communities abroad in particular. Indian Americans will readily profess their affiliation to caste, color, linguistic, regional, and religious identities. They live with multiple faces and multiple identities in their daily activities. A cursory look at a matrimonial section of any newspaper targeted either at Indians or diasporic Indians will confirm my claim (see Kachru 1992 and Pandey 1998).

Indian diaspora: Its distinctive and unique nature

Against this background of multiplicity and pluralism, it is natural to ask the question: What is common between Trinidadian/Hindu/Bihari/Brahmin, South African/American/Gurajati/Hindu, a clean shaven Punjabi-Mexican/Indian-American, and a Hong Kong/Ismaili-Muslim? Do they form a cohesive Indian diasporic community like the Jewish, Chinese, or African diasporic communities? While the Jewish diaspora can be viewed as unified on account of religion, the Chinese on account of language, and the African on account of race, the Indian diaspora is very distinct. It is true that Indians in America have not given up their caste, regional, linguistic, or religious identities; however, these affiliations have been either transformed or weakened. The weakening of linguistic identity is self-evident from the way Indian languages are dying among the diasporic Indian communities and English is a source of one common bond. (For the treatment of language death, see Bhatia 1988 for Trinidad; Mitherie 1991 for South Africa; Gambhir 1986 and 1988 for Mauritius and Guyana; Moag 1979 and Siegal 1988 for Fiji; and Singaravelou 1990 for Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Reunion). Because religious identity crosses language boundaries, it takes a stronger hold than linguistic identity among Indians. While pluralism and diversity are the striking features of the Indian identity, unity in diversity is what marks Indianness in Indians. Overnativeness is another feature to which I will return later.

One might take issue with my claim that there is a single unifying feature in Jewish, Chinese, and African diaspora. Perhaps, at a deeper level, these diasporic communities are as diversified as the Indian diaspora. But one thing is quite clear: the degree of diversity among Indians is quite staggering, both in qualitative and quantitative terms.

Perception of Indian Americans in America

In order to seek answers to questions (3) and (4), over the past four years I conducted a survey in my honors undergraduate course at Syracuse University. The students were given the following task:

When you (as an American) think of India/Indians and Asian Indians in the US, some dominant images involuntarily flash in your mind. Give the words (nouns or adjectives) which best characterize those.

In addition to providing their own responses, they were asked to interview at least five other Americans for this survey. About 150 subjects have participated in this survey during the past three years. Although all kinds of labels about Indians in the U.S. were reported, including 'belly dancer', the most relevant and prominent ones include the following:

GROUP CHARACTERISTICS: intelligent, quiet, friendly, serious, smart, educated, hard working, traditional, less integrated, varied, many religions, not outgoing, interested in sciences, reserved, rich, vegetarians, very religious, male-dominated, women discouraged from playing sports.

OCCUPATIONS: doctors, TAs, good jobs, little food/convenience-store owners, taxi drivers.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: eye of God (forehead dot), loose clothes, smelly, dark skin, dark eyes.

Most of the subjects admit that their knowledge of Indians is very superficial and is primarily based on American newspapers, TV programs, and Hollywood movies. From the survey, it became clear that two perceptions coexist in America. One is of a generic nature which was best captured by the remark, 'I do not think anything about them, they are Indians.' This generic perception is a widely held belief among Americans. However, there is another side of the coin, too. A specific perception, which is usually formed by the main-stream media, Hollywood movies, and TV programs, also exists. This specific American perception of Indian Americans comes strikingly close to the self-descriptors used by Indians, in the sense that both pinpoint the diversity of Indians. Although both the generic and the specific perceptions suffer from over-generalization, some stereotypical features reflect deeper distancing and some racial tensions between the Indian Americans and the white Americans. This tension is evident from the following remarks made by the subjects:

'fractionalized', 'We consider them inferior', 'cheap', 'late shift convenient store workers', 'smelly,' 'annoying', 'enduring', 'hostile', 'aggravated', 'upset', 'annoying accent — understand them', 'discriminated against', 'segregated', 'different cultural outlook', 'mentally oppressed', 'fat', 'don't fit in', 'under-represented', 'funny accent', 'business oriented', 'neighbor rolling in the grass', 'untouchable', 'Mahesh yogi'.

Although the task of separating myths from reality is outside the scope of this paper, Indian Americans do feel betrayed and exploited by the American media. It is their widely-held belief that the American media portrays Indians in an overwhelmingly negative light. The negative images promoted by the media include Indians as being fragmented, queer, and non-Christians who practice voodoo or cultist religions. To some extent, such images are natural consequences and extensions of the media's perception of India. Since Indian Independence, India has been portrayed as divided and fragmented. Predications about the disintegration of India are made often by political pundits. This fragmented view is one-sided, according to Indians. Gruesome images left by movies such as 'Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom' do irreparable damage to the perception of Indians by Americans. Their sacred symbols, especially Hindu symbols, are exploited for commercial gains and damage their religious tolerance. Two recent cases in point are Madonna wearing the sacred *Vaishnava Tilak* (which is a symbol of purity) on her forehead, and the Aerosmith album cover that shows distorted and mutilated images of Krishna. So swift was the reaction to the latter incident by Indian Americans that SONY had to withdraw the cover. (Interestingly, there was little uproar in India.) In short, although there are some areas of overlap between the American perception of Indian Americans and their self-perceptions, a gap still remains, which needs to be bridged by developing a more accurate and balanced view of Indian Americans. In short, Indian Americans are seen as 'a part yet apart' in the American perception. Indian discourse styles, including their accent, are still unappealing for Americans in general. This, in part, answers question (6). The mainstream American media poses considerable hindrances to forming and promoting a more accurate perception of Indian Americans in America.

Constructing and negotiating Indian identity and media

There are three major agents in constructing, negotiating, and transmitting the Indian diasporic identity: (1) ethnic Indian media in America and other countries; (2) the Indian film industry, and (3) business networking with global and local businesses.

Indian ethnic media and the formation of Indian identity

The ethnic/expatriate Indian media has a long tradition of promoting Indian identity and are notable for THEIR DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONTENT. More than twenty Indian newspapers or newsletters were produced during the first half of the twentieth century which dealt with the formation of Indian identity, and the problems and concerns of the Indian diasporic community. The blueprints of the Indian identity were set by the weekly newspaper, the *Hindustan Gadar* 'Indian Revolution', which was the main publication of the Gadar Party. It appeared in both English and Punjabi. It was published by Dr. Lala Har Dayal, a noted Indian Nationalist, then a Professor at Stanford University. The first issue of the newspaper (San Francisco, Oct. 22, 1913-July 8, 1917) ran the following advertisement, which best exemplifies Indian identity by way of setting the stage for

the Indian nationalist movement among Indian Americans and the revolt against British colonialism in India:

Wanted — Brave Soldiers to Stir Up Gadar in India:
 Pay: Death
 Prize: Martyrdom
 Pension: Liberty
 Field of Battle: India (*Gadar*: the Urdu word for 'revolution')

The newspaper often published long lists of revolutionaries and their plights, cartoons depicting the excesses of the British empire, and detailed descriptions of relevant political events from all over the world with painstaking details. What was the impact of the ethnic press at that time in England and America? It sent shock waves to British authorities in India and to Britain, as an American ally. The movement produced the ingredients of a spy thriller and high-suspense courtroom drama. Ram Chandra and the sixteen other members of the Gadar Party were arrested for Hindu-German conspiracy.

In comparison to the availability of ethnic media during the first half of the century, there has been an explosion of print and electronic media forms in the second half of the century. A list of Indian-American newspapers, Radio, and TV stations is given in Table 2. Although the current state of Indian-American media may lack the thrill and the high drama of the Gadar era, it plays an important role in the promotion of the new Indian identity. The ethnic media get a further boost from the Indian media in achieving this shared goal. For example, the case of the coverage of Indian Americans in the most widely read magazine, *India Today*, shows the asymmetrical characteristics of the coverage of India and Indians on one hand and of the Indians in America on the other. The coverage of the former has the elements of sensationalism and sectarianism, and it depicts an image of Indians which is quite familiar and predominant in Western media. The coverage of the Indian Americans is presented in a small special section of the magazine called the 'North American section'. Indian Americans are almost always presented as great role models. Indianness is depicted as a great virtue to which even the younger generation subscribes. The content analysis of the two sections reveals that the North American section places a special emphasis on the good news that one could use. The stories usually deal with high-profile achievers and success stories of Indian Americans. Students with perfect SAT scores, computer whiz kids, and Valedictorian speeches in Sanskrit by Harvard graduates are covered in abundance. Although problems of Indian Americans are addressed, such stories are overridden by the 'model' and 'success' stories, with their evidence of genuine pride in their subjects' Indian heritage.

Table 2: Ethnic Indian-American Media**NEWSPAPERS**

India Abroad, News India Times, India Monitor, India Tribune, Naya Padkar (Gujarati), India Today, Asia on Line, India Post, India Journal, Masala Magazine, Voice of Asia, Indo-American News, Asian News, India Herald, Kerala Darshan (English & Malayalam), Little India, India Light, India Chronicle, Chicago India Times, India West, Financial World, Kerala Express, Kerala News Digest, Pravasi (Malayalam), Presidents and Prime Ministers, LA India, India Currents Magazine, Hinduism Today, The Asiatic Journal.

RADIO

Bharat Vani Radio, Voice of America, The Asia Observer/Kashmir Today, All India Radio (South Carolina), Jhankar, Geet Gujarati (Gujarati), Raunak Mela, Rangcen Mafgil, Asian on Line and Indo-American News.

TELEVISION

Vision of Asia, Eye on Asia, TV Asia, India Broadcasting Network, Asian Panorama, Namaste America, International Primetime Network, Namaste Bombay, Bharat Darshan, Alphastar/Asian Television Network, New Anchor, Everest TV.

Indian film industry and over-nativeness

Although several social, religious, linguistic, and cultural associations are important sources of promotion and maintenance of 'Indianness' among Indians in America, all of these societies and associations combined cannot match the role played by 'Bollywood.' Bollywood, the Bombay version of Hollywood, is the largest producer of films in the world. Hindi movies around the world promote the theme 'unity in diversity' and traditional Indian values. Melodramatic in nature and loaded with songs and dances, they show the triumph of Indianness over non-Indian values. The appeal of these values is not restricted to Indians or Indians abroad, but it also reaches out to non-Indians. A case in point is in the Middle East, where almost every Hindi movie is subtitled in Arabic, a language which most Indians do not even understand. For example, movies such as *Hindustani*, meaning 'Indians', was first made in Tamil and then in Hindi. Both movies were loved by both Tamil and Hindi speakers. The linguistic rivalry among Tamils and Hindi speakers becomes diluted when it comes to the appreciation of Hindi movies. The same is true of Indians abroad.

Consider another example, Ramanand Sagar's TV serial *Mahabharat*. *Mahabharat* represents one of the greatest epics of the Sanskrit language, the most voluminous book in world literature. A couple of years ago this serial became so popular that it can be compared with the TV serial *Dallas* in the 1970s in the U.S.

The BBC produced a special version of *Mahabharat* for consumption in the United Kingdom. Japan produced the entire Hindi transcript of the serial in two volumes to teach Japanese students Hindi, Hinduism, and the essentials of the Indian culture.

The Hindi movie industry has not only united diasporic Indians world-wide with India, but its role in the promotion of 'Indianness' is undisputed. See Chakravarty 1993 and Berger 1998 for more details. It is the lifeline of the promotion of the Indian identity. The Indians abroad take this identity, perhaps, much more seriously than Indians in India, and in that process they become more Indian or over-native. This observation is made over and over again by Indian artists, scholars, and media personalities when they visit abroad.

In addition to Hindi films, South Indian classical dances, music, and food form the common core of the Indian identity. For example, Punjabi Bhangra music and the Gujarati stick dance (the Dandia Ras dance) transcend their regional appeal and become the markers of overseas Indian identity. (Also see Pareles 1999 on the musical and dance diaspora of the Gypsies and Indians.) The role of the cassette industry (see Manuel 1993) and business networking are other means of promoting Indian identity.

Business networking and Indian American identity

In what follows, I will identify how the three forces — the Indian movie industry, and the ethnic Indian American media join hands with global and 'homeland/Indian' business networking to serve as a catalyst in the promotion of Indian identity in print advertising. Let us analyze some markers of Indianness, the way they appear in ethnic Indian print-media advertising. The data are drawn primarily from the three years 1995-1998 of the weekly newspaper *India Abroad* and the monthly magazine *India Today*. Both have the largest readership in the United States among the newspaper and magazine categories. In addition, *India Today* has the highest circulation among the English-language magazines in India, with regional-language versions in major Indian languages.

Markers of Indian identity and the ethnic media

In light of the foregoing discussion dealing with the construction and negotiation of Indian identity as reflected in the media, it is possible to answer question (5), namely, what marker or markers are chosen for Indian identity. The role of the main-stream Indian and American media in carving out the desired Indian identity is less meaningful and important to diasporic Indians in general and Indian Americans in particular than the ethnic media is. These two segments of the main-stream media are seen as being more a hindrance than a help in shaping the desired or perceived identity. The ethnic media find more receptive partners in the Indian film industry and in local and global businesses than in main-stream Indian and American media to achieve the goal of creating Indian identity. The approach that the ethnic media follow in the process of negotiating Indian identity can best be

characterized as a 'multifactoral' and 'mixed' approach. This approach is naturally more realistic and appealing than a singular, monolithic approach. Markers drawn from various categories, such as history, literature, languages, religions, folk and cultural beliefs, combine with verbal and visual images to create a 'mosaic portrayal' of Indian identity. Naturally, the various categories do not carry equal significance. For example, religions receive more significance than languages and rurality may take precedence over urbanization, past supercedes the present in print advertising in ethnic media. An analysis of three representative advertisements will support this point.

Consider an AT & T ad. The image of the Rajasthani rural women carrying water in a desert region invokes the harsh but fruitful realities of Indian life, and this image is further amplified by a Hindi attention-getter in Roman script — *buunda buunda se saagar* 'drop by drop, fill an ocean'. Such images are common to both diasporic and nondiasporic Indian identity, and thus hold special significance and appeal. The images of super-heroes (Gandhi, Nehru), historic events (India's first Prime Minister's historic speech from the Red Fort in Delhi, in the 50th year of Indian independence), monuments (the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort), sacred marriage rituals, and classical Indian dancers are often combined with Hindi words in ads placed by the banking, insurance, and communication industries.

Real-life achievers are applauded in ads such as that placed by Met Life. Headliners such as *taliyaan* 'applause', *mubaarak* 'congratulations' are drawn from Hindi-Urdu, while sacred symbols of Hinduism and Sikhism are combined with themes such as pilgrimages, festivals, religious texts, mantras (*Gayatri Mantra*), and rituals to mark Indian religious identity. Literary and musical heritage forms such as Urdu *Qvvaali* and Tamil *kartvayam* have an appeal that creates a larger identity beyond the confines of religious and linguistic boundaries. Indian TV programs, film premieres, Bollywood concerts, Indian soap operas, combined with sweepstakes, exemplify yet another pan-Indian identity which is grounded in the popular culture of India. Ads dealing with the computer industry involve more contemporary themes, but even in those the computer does not fail to invoke Indian identity by means of mixing the images of Indian deities on the computer screen or a pan-Indian greeting such as *namaste* or *namaskar*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many faces of Indians abroad. In spite of the fact that multiplicity and pluralism are integral parts of the views and attitudes of diasporic Indians, Indianness represents a unifying feature of their ethnic identity which is created or negotiated by means of blending and wedding oppositions and multiplicity. These oppositions can best be characterized by the different petals of a lotus flower which reinforce an ancient Indian view of the universe/earth (see Figure 1). The different petals (oppositions) and their layering (relative importance) constitute an Indian identity (see Figure 2). The Hindi film industry, ethnic

Indian media abroad, and business networking at the global and the local levels serve as important agents in shaping a unified new identity. With these forces at work, the Indian diaspora will gain further strength and momentum in the future. Most importantly, the Indian-American community will provide a model for the various diasporic communities in the future, and provide a crucial link which was missing between the old and the new diasporic Indian communities.

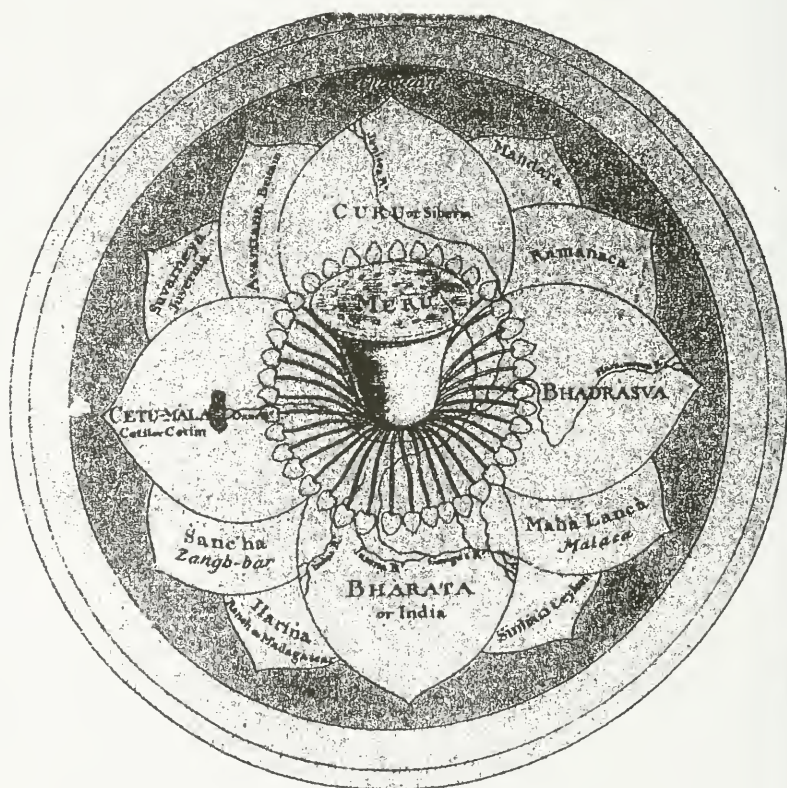


Figure 1: Indian view of the universe/earth

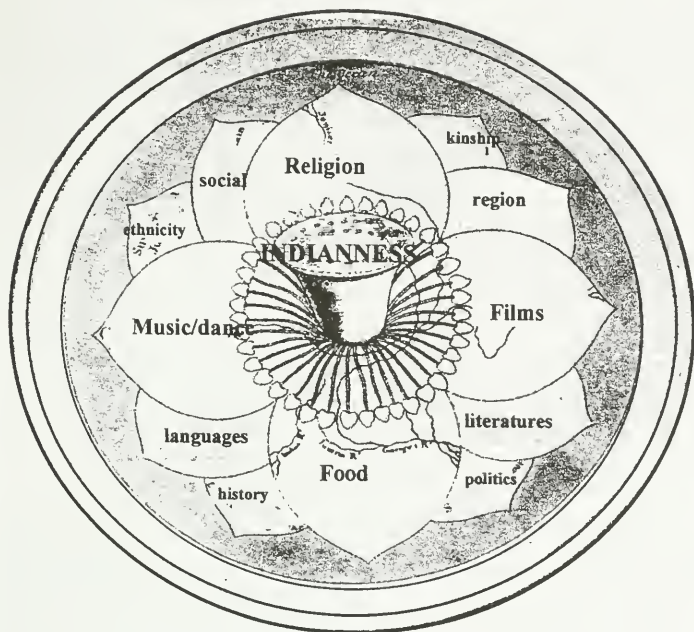


Figure 2: Markers of Indianness

NOTE

I wish to express my deep appreciation to Professors Braj B. Kachru, Salikoko Mufwene, and William C. Ritchie for their comments on the earlier version of this paper. I have specially benefited from the comments and suggestions of the participants in the Diaspora conference.

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